



Good Friday

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Anoka, Minnesota
April 7, 2023 ♦ 7:30p.m.



We are an Open and Affirming Church.
No matter who you are or
where you are in your life's journey,
you are welcome here.



We do not anticipate that livestreaming will be available for this service.
However, if that changes, you can watch it live or later at:
<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

Welcome

Reading – Genesis 1:31-2:1 (in other words)

And finally there came a moment when God paused and took a deep breath, as if drawing back in all of the Spirit that she had breathed out. Exhausted and sweating, and feeling as if the work was done, she leaned back against her birthing-couch and finally allowed herself to look upon everything she had made. The unimaginable beauty of it all almost stole her breath away again. Blues and grays danced with oranges and reds as the skies turned from day into evening, all while glorious, flickering bands of green luminescence added their music and wonder in the north and south. Great herds of roaming creatures wandered across the lands, sheltering in the heat of the day under vast canopies of leafy boughs. The waters of the heavens fell upon the earth, bringing life to all living things as they flowed from the tops of mountains until they emptied into wide, rolling seas that themselves were home to all manner of swimming, wriggling, joyful life. And then God looked upon the earth-creatures she had made, humankind shaped and called to carry divine Love to the rest of creation, and thought all of it together was indeed, very good. Thus did the sixth era of Creation end, and God rested from her labor.

Lighting of Candles (*during the song*)

Singing

“Wakantanka Taku Nitawa” #3
“Great Spirit God” #341 (v. 4)

from two Christian Hymns of the Dakota people.

**Many and great, O God, are your works, maker of sea and sky;
your hands have set the heavens with stars,
your fingers spread the mountains and plains.
Lo, at your word the waters were formed; deep seas obey your voice.**

**That day you came to dwell on the earth, bringing us all great joy!
The nations scattered over the world,
to them you gave the light of all life.
O Jesus, O Compassionate One, we offer praise to you.**

**Grant unto us communion with you, O star-abiding One;
come unto us and dwell with us:
with you are found the gifts of life.
Bless us with life that has no end, eternal life with you.**

Reading – 2 Kings 17:1-6

In the twelfth year of King Ahaz of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel; he reigned nine years. ² He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not like the kings of Israel who were before him. ³ King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against him; Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute. ⁴ But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to King So of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria confined him and imprisoned him. ⁵ Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. ⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Singing

“Ah, Holy Jesus” #218 (vv. 1-3)

**Ah, holy Jesus, how have you offended,
that mortal judgment has on you descended?
By foes derided, by your own rejected, O most afflicted!**

**Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon you?
It is my treason, Jesus, that has slain you.
And I, dear Jesus, I it was denied you, I crucified you.**

**For me, kind Jesus, was your incarnation,
your mortal sorrow, and your life's oblation.
Your death of anguish and your bitter passion, for my salvation.**

A light goes out.

Reading – 2 Kings 25:1-11

And in the ninth year of [Zedekiah's] reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; they built siegeworks against it all around. ² So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ³ On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. ⁴ Then a breach was made in the city wall; the king with all the soldiers fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah. ⁵ But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; all his army was scattered, deserting him. ⁶ Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence on him. ⁷ They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon. ⁸ In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month-- which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon-- Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹ He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ¹⁰ All the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. ¹¹ Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon-- all the rest of the population.

Singing

“Journey to Gethsemane” #219 (vv. 1-3)

**Journey to Gethsemane, go and feel the tempter’s power;
your Redeemer’s conflict see, watch the anguish of this hour;
do not hide or turn away; learn from Jesus how to pray.**

**Follow then to Pilate’s hall, view the Lord of life arraigned;
crowned with thorns and mocked by all, faithfully this pain sustained;
greater still than shame or loss, Jesus now must face the cross.**

**Calvary’s mournful mountain climb, see the Savior lifted high.
Mark the miracle of time, God’s own Child is sacrificed;
“It is finished!” Jesus cries; learn from Jesus how to die.**

A light goes out.

Reading – Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon-- there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. ² On the willows there we hung up our harps. ³ For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" ⁴ How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! ⁶ Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. ⁷ Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!" ⁸ O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! ⁹ Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

Special Music

“On the Willows” from *Godspell*
Kari Johnson and Laurie Elvig, Duet

Stephen Schwartz

*On the willows, there we hung up our lyres
for our captors there required of us songs, and our tormenters mirth,
saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
But how can we sing? (How can we sing?)*

*Sing the Lord's song? (Sing the Lord's song?)
In a foreign land?*

A light goes out.

Meditation

“The Worst Possible Thing”

Rev. Chris McArdle

Reading – Luke 22:47-54a

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" ⁴⁹ When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!" ⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away...

Singing

Three verses set to *PASSION CHORALE* #226

**We yearn, O Christ, for wholeness and for your healing touch;
too long have we felt helpless; our burdens seemed too much.
Forgetting all pretenses we make our pleadings heard,
in hope and expectation await your gracious Word.**

**O God, how we have wandered and hidden from your face;
in foolishness have squandered your legacy of grace.
But how, in exile dwelling, we turn with fear and shame,
as distant but compelling, you call us each by name.**

**O sacred head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
nor scornfully surrounded with thorns, your only crown,
how pale you are with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How does your visage languish which once was bright as morn!**

A light goes out.

Reading – Mark 15:1-5, 15b-20

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." ³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

^{15b}...after flogging Jesus, Pilate handed him over to be crucified. ¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Singing

“They Crucified My Lord” (page 11)

They crucified my Lord, and he never said a mumbalin’ word (x2)

Not a word, not a word, not a word.

They nailed him to a tree, and he never said a mumbalin’ word (x2)

Not a word, not a word, not a word.

They pierced him in the side, and he never said a mumbalin’ word (x2)

Not a word, not a word, not a word.

The blood came trick-a-lin’ down, and he never said a mumbalin’ word (x2)

Not a word, not a word, not a word.

He bowed his head and died, and he never said a mumbalin’ word (x2)

Not a word, not a word, not a word.

A light goes out.

Reading – Luke 2:8-16

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Singing

“Once in Royal David’s City” #145 (alt.)

**Once in royal David’s city stood a lowly cattle shed.
Where a mother laid her baby in a manger for a bed:
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.**

**He came down to earth from heaven who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall;
with the poor and meek and lowly, lived on earth our Savior holy.
And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love;
for that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.**

A light goes out.

Reading – Mark 15:33-38

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you

forsaken me?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Singing

“Were You There?” #229 (vv. 1-3)

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (x2)
O sometimes it caused me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? (x2)
O sometimes it caused me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when the sun refused to shine? (x2)
O sometimes it caused me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

The Christ Candle goes out.

Reading – Matthew 27:57-61

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

A light goes out.

“Jesus, Remember Me”

Berthier/Taizé

Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.

Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.

They Crucified My Lord

219

He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word



1 They cru - ci - fied my Lord,
2 They nailed him to a tree,
3 They pierced him in the side, and he nev - er said a
4 The blood came trick - a - lin' down,
5 He bowed his head and died,



mum - ba - lin' word; they cru - ci - fied my Lord,
they nailed him to a tree,
they pierced him in the side,
the blood came trick - a - lin' down,
he bowed his head and died,



and he nev - er said a mum - ba - lin' word.



Not a word, not a word, not a word.



Sermon Text

I don't even recall anymore what exactly I was intending to write when I titled this sermon "The Worst Possible Thing." Something about Jesus dying being the worst possible thing, I suppose. But as I sat down to write a sermon to go with that title, the news was filled for a day or two with the news of teachers and children killed once again by a person with a gun. Seven dead in Nashville. Did you know that on that same day, five were injured in a mass shooting in Milwaukee? The day before that, 2 were killed and 2 injured in Philadelphia, and six were injured in Minneapolis. Two were killed and five were injured in Little Rock. Back up a few days and there were five killed in Sumter, South Carolina. A few days before that four died in Birmingham, Alabama. A few days before that five died in Hialeah, Florida.

People keep asking how many more kids have to die before we do something about it, but maybe the problem is that we've spread out the deaths so much. They need to be bigger, you know? More profoundly significant in either the people killed or in sheer numbers so that it changes our behavior. Maybe in that way they make a lasting impression, like it did on 9/11 when 2,996 died and we killed at least 177,000 in person. Or when we dropped nukes on Japan and killed possibly more than 200,000. In the former case, we've held back the tanks from something as busy ever since. For the latter, we've resisted dropping or launching any more. I wonder how many people would need to die in one mass shooting in the United States before it made any lasting impact on our love affair with guns? Twenty-six children and teachers isn't enough. A bunch of Congresspeople in a baseball park didn't do it, either. Though, in an earlier time, almost killing the Gipper did result in a ban on assault-style weapons. I have no illusions that it would do that today.

You'd think we'd learn. So many of us read a Bible which is filled again and again with stories of the *worst possible thing*—at least, until something even worse than that comes along. In 721 BCE, the Assyrian army swept across the northern kingdom of Israel and erased that country, killing and deporting who knows how many people. Judah thought they were lucky; the armies stopped short of taking Jerusalem and the south too. Judah even tried to reclaim the lost northern territories, though that got the aggressive king Josiah killed. Then in 597, the Babylonians came along and finished what the Assyrians started. Judah found out then what the worst possible thing was. They spent the next seventy years in exile in a foreign land, weeping when they remembered Zion. Wondering in song form how their captors might feel if it was their children who were murdered.

Like I said; you'd think we'd remember that. Our Jewish neighbors aren't so shortsighted. They learned that lesson so many times in the hardest of ways, culminating in the Holocaust. *Never again* is their refrain. Of course, that generational trauma has made them desperately afraid, and we're seeing right now how that kind of fear can, over time, fuel the very thing that caused it. Ask the Palestinians what their worst possible thing is. I'm sure they could tell you.

In the history of the Church, maybe the worst possible thing happened right off the bat: Jesus died. The Messiah. Thought by some to be a long-awaited savior who would free the people from Roman tyranny. Believed by others to be the Son of God, perhaps even literally. A promised descendant of David who would restore the throne.

Yet, it was so easy for Pilate to have him arrested and hung on a cross to die for everyone to see.

Maybe not enough people held him closely to their hearts. Mary, of course. Peter, who had to feel pretty bad about betraying him. His mom, his brothers, his sisters. But others? Jesus didn't do anything to curb Rome's power. To many, he was just another failed Messiah. His death was just another example of how powerful the State was. The crowds faded away.

And then, of course, the Church built up the story of his rising and made it about heavenly things instead of a warning about how easy it is for the State to rule with brutality and cruelty. Three hundred years later, the Church married the State, and it didn't take long before they were fighting wars of aggression. Maybe *that* was the worst possible thing to happen to the Church.

Without that, would the Church still have taken Jesus's very clear statements about rejecting violence and the tools of violence and started looking at them through a funhouse mirror? Would Christians have refrained from deciding that guns were holy, that the idea of the right to self-arm was more important than the right to live and live abundantly? More important than beating our swords into plowshares?

But as bad as all that is, maybe there's something worse.

Do you know how hard it is to find hymns that talk about Jesus's death and resurrection that DON'T frame Jesus's death was a good thing, a necessary thing, a cosmological transaction that traded the lifeblood of one innocent, profoundly kind man in exchange for the sin of the human race?

What thou, my Lord, hast suffered

Was all for sinners' gain

Oh mine was the transgression

But thine the deadly pain.

Jesus's death was awful, particularly for those who followed him. The death of an individual at the hands of the State is always awful. But somewhere along the line, the Church decided that Jesus's death was anything other than that. It was something God had planned all along. It was the fault of the Jews. It was humanity's collective sin. It was anything other than the State-sanctioned execution of a reformer, a community organizer, a passionate preacher, a mother's son.

For if Jesus died by divine design, we don't have to blame the State. We don't have to blame ourselves in any way that would actually move us to change. We don't have to admit that we stopped reading right after "every man should buy a sword." We can preserve our collective delusion of righteous violence. We can ignore how often we talk about "the freedom of Christ" even as we say it's guns that preserve our freedom.

I'm not sure there's anything worse than that. I think that may actually be the worst possible thing. We became the very thing against which Jesus railed. We took his warnings and made them virtues.

I know this is super depressing. I'm sorry about that, but not totally. Because here's the thing: calling today GOOD shouldn't be because a great and glorious good thing came out of a terrible, no good, horrible, very bad day. Calling it Good Friday is supposed to be ironic, but not wink-wink ironic when we lazily think "ironic" just means "coincidental" or even "funny". It should be totally, truly, honestly, and vulnerably ironic: it's NOT a good day. It's a BAD day. A HORRIBLE day. The worst possible day of all days because Good Friday became a cause for celebration instead of a day of mourning. A day of repentance. Of shame. A day on which we remember just how badly we failed the lesson. How badly we failed him.

But that doesn't mean it should be a day when we wallow in some weird, let's-make-it-about-us moment of how awful and sinful we are and then we wait until Sunday to experience forgiveness. Good Friday SHOULD be a day on which we collectively remember just how bad we screwed up so that we can envision a future where we address that. Where we repent of that mistake and resolve to get it right.

A day in which we stop letting innocent people die rather than changing our ways.

Because to keep going forward as we have all these years?

That really would be the worst possible thing. Amen.